The Forgotten Dialect of the Heart

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The Forgotten Dialect of the Heart

by LovelyLotus

Summary

Hannibal and Will's trip to Prague is waylaid when Will is assigned another mission in Baltimore. As they wait for the details to arrive, Will and Hannibal settle into the city, and Will does his best to avoid the pitfalls his past provides, including old friends.

As Will stood, his curls brushed across Hannibal's nose. He no longer smelled of anything but sweat and the unique scent that was Will: a wild grove by the sea, rain clinging to the pines like glass pearls—the faintest after-trace of orange in the sultry wind. They moved to opposite ends of the mat to start a new match.

Notes

This is the third work in the series. I recommend starting with Les Fleurs du Mal to understand Will and Hannibal's relationship in this AU.

Une Barque sur L'ocean

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Baltimore, Maryland

Will hurtled into wakefulness with a vague and unsettling sense that he was falling. The room was dark and unfamiliar. He was curled up on a lumpy couch, his shoes haphazardly placed off to the side. Panic reared its ugly head. He had woken up in a state much like this twice before. Neither occasion had led to anything good.

He didn't remember much from yesterday night, save for ambiguous blurs of booze and blaring dance lights. Who had he gone home with? His head throbbed.

He reached for the concealed knife in his boot, prepared to kill his way out if he had to. The house remained silent.

Just get back to Hannibal , he thought, *and everything will make sense again* .

Except would it? Even alcohol-induced-comas couldn't wipe the memory of his last encounter with Hannibal from his mind.

The slow rising sun refracted off the glass chambers of his mind. His fragile contribution to the mental palace he shared with Hannibal. The scene diffracted across the walls, transparent to him now.

The moment he had kissed Hannibal, love had not exactly been at the forefront of the gesture —he could admit that to himself. Instead, he had felt an intense sort of desperation to be drowned. To have what he had done to Klauss wiped out from his mind by Hannibal's mouth on his. To have Hannibal's arms around him like safe harbour while they suffocated together.

He had wanted to use Hannibal as nothing more than a safety blanket because the reality was that yesterday, he had talked a man into sucicide, using his empathy as nothing more than a knife to render all the tender places. The reality was that it had been easy. The target was already suicidal, Will reminded himself. But he had the recurring feeling that he could persuade anyone into doing anything he wanted now. Some line, some barrier, some limit in his own mind had been struck. The reality was that he had the capacity—the penchant—for manipulation. Another stain marking him as something less than human.

There was a rattle from another room. Will carefully tucked the knife in the waist of his pants near the small of his back. Surprise was every assassin's most important tool, and Will knew how to use it well. Whoever had taken him was obviously incompetent. He hadn't been shackled or locked in, and they had obviously not searched him well enough.

He stood quietly, not bothering with his shoes. Too noisy. The room spun out of control. This is why Hannibal insisted on a limited alcohol intake—wine with meals and after missions

only. Too late now.

He should probably scope out the apartment first. Identify the number of targets and possible escape routes. That's what Hannibal would do…

But he wasn't Hannibal. He wasn't even really on an assignment right now. He crept his way to the kitchen and peered cautiously inside. He paused.

An Asian lady bustled about, making coffee and breakfast.

Will vaguely remembered her from last night.

"You can come in, Will. You don't have to lurk in the doorway like that."

He had divulged his real name to her then. There could be no margin for error in this.

Will stepped into the kitchen silently. Her story spiralled into existence and slipped through the air on glossy raven wings. A body of observations and undeniable truths. Will did not resist it this time.

Innocent. She was innocent. Harmless. Kind. Graceful in a way few people were anymore. Had a penchant for doing the right thing. She had taken him to her home from the bar to protect him. To let him sleep it off. Will couldn't kill her.

"How are you feeling? You went at it pretty hard last night." The almost over-familiar way she spoke to him was vaguely unnerving. How much had he told her about himself?

"I'm sorry, who are you again?"

The lady huffed in amusement. "Black-out drunk? Wouldn't have thunk it. I'm Beverly Katz."

Memories soared into being. Will almost winced from embarrassment. "Nice to meet you sober, Beverly," he finally said, carefully reaching his hand out for a handshake.

One firm shake. "Pleasure's all mine. Now, do you want to help me with breakfast?"

The chocolate chip pancakes were drenched in maple syrup. The generous pat of butter on top was already dissolved into a creamy swirl.

"Whipped cream?" Jimmy Price, one of Beverly's roommates offered.

Will accepted the Reddi wip wordlessly and created a generous spiral. Hannibal would have a heart attack if he could see what Will was about to eat. He passed the cream on to Brian Zeller, Beverly's other roommate, who nodded in thanks.

Will took a bite. It was bliss—dissolving into pure processed sugar in his mouth. He closed his eyes, savoring the taste. From there, breakfast progressed silently, the faint murmur of small talk almost soothing background noise. Will could feel their curiosity on the edges of his consciousness. They wanted to know about him, but they were polite enough not to ask. He didn't offer up anything either. However much he liked Beverly, he knew he couldn't trust them.

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Before Will left, Beverly pulled him aside.

"Now, I don't mean to be intrusive, but some of the things you said last night were a little worrying. Are you okay, Will? Do you need any help?"

Will instantly felt the tension creep up his lower spine.

"I'm fine, Beverly."

She looked right into his eyes for a moment too long.

"That's great, Will. But, just in case you ever need someone, you can reach me at this number," she said, handing him a slip of paper with a number scribbled across in dark ink.

Will didn't have to ask why she was being so nice to him. He knew why. For some reason, Beverly had decided that she liked Will, and this was her way of showing it. She wanted friendship, but Will wasn't really suited for that. Hannibal, and maybe like one other person, were the only ones it had ever worked out with.

They would be leaving for Prague in a few days, and this meeting would become inconsequential. "Thank you," he said anyway. Will placed the slip in his pocket carefully, planning to pitch it somewhere before Hannibal could see it.

"Take care, Will."

"You too, Beverly. Thank you."

Will sauntered into their hotel room almost sheepishly. His curls were in disarray and his clothing was disheveled. The air smelled like strangers and artificial maple syrup. He looked like he had had quite a night.

Hannibal's possessiveness almost boiled over, but he didn't allow it to show. He didn't allow the words to leave his tongue: *Where did you go? I was worried* . He calmed himself by scenting the air more thoroughly. Will hadn't done anything too untoward last night. Hannibal only smelled the faint bitter traces of alcohol. But still, he had to be punished somehow.

“I will give you half an hour for your morning ablutions, Will. Then, we will be heading out to spar.”

Will’s shoulders drooped, no doubt anticipating the pain he would suffer jostling with his hangover.

“Additionally, I think it would be good to practice your Italian today. *Non voglio sentire nessun inglese.* ”

“ *Come vuoi* ,” Will conceded, sighing.

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There was something deeply satisfying about sparring with Will. Despite the routine they had formed over the years (they sparred for a few hours a few times a week), they always managed to surprise each other. Additionally, something primitive inside Hannibal resonated with both the intermingling of their scents that came from wrestling on the mat as well as the chance to pin his beloved down just the way he wanted him.

Will squirmed against his hold, gasping for breath. His hair was mussed up and his cheeks were flushed pink from the exertion. Hannibal got caught a moment too long admiring the view, and before he knew it, he was flat on his back, Will straddling his pelvis. Will moved quickly to secure his limbs with one hand, moving the forearm of his other to push against Hannibal’s sternum, threatening the throat and airways.

“*Arrenditi* ,” Will demanded, baring his teeth. He was exquisite.

“*Mai* ,” Hannibal replied, bucking his hips up to unseat Will. When that didn’t work, he switched to wiggling them back and forth.

Will burst into laughter, loosening the hold. “*Oh my god. Stop shimmying, Hannibal. I feel like I’m on one of those mechanical bulls in a fairground*.”

Hannibal quickly twisted them over as Will’s grip loosened. He pinned Will more gently, remaining on his side next to his beloved rather than straddling him.

“*Just as I planned, darling* .”

Will laughed harder. His head tilted back exposing the long creamy stretch of his neck. His Adam’s apple bobbed as he swallowed, and Hannibal ached with want.

“*This doesn’t count* ,” Will argued, out-of-breath.

“*Of course it does, caro. Now are you ready to go again?”*

Will nodded. Hannibal stood up first, reaching down to lift his partner up. As Will stood, his curls brushed across Hannibal’s nose. He no longer smelled of anything but sweat and the unique scent that was Will: a wild grove by the sea, rain clinging to the pines like glass pearls —the faintest after-trace of orange in the sultry wind. They moved to opposite ends of the mat to start a new match.

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After they had worn each other out, they went back to the hotel room to shower, then left for the restaurant.

They had just been seated on the terrace when Bedelia called.

It was notably out of the ordinary. Typically, after Will completed the last kill in his cycle, they had about 6 weeks off. The time was useful for traveling, relaxing, practicing old skills, and learning new ones. Hannibal already had their agenda for Prague planned.

He rose from the table, moving away. Will looked terribly curious, but the rules of their society meant Hannibal wouldn't be able to share certain details of their call with him. Including the identity of the caller.

He pressed the green button, bringing the phone to his ear.

"Bedelia. What a pleasant surprise."

"Hannibal. Your stay in Baltimore has been extended. There's another mission for Will. You will receive the details in about a week."

"Hasn't he reached the end of this cycle?" Hannibal questioned mildly.

"There's a loose end to tie up, and you both are already there. Don't worry—your time off won't be cut short."

"Understood. I'll tell Will."

"Yes, and give him our regards for his last assignment. It was impressive," Bedelia admitted begrudgingly.

"I will. Have a pleasant day."

Bedelia hung up without responding.

Hannibal made his way back to Will. He took his seat and waited for the inevitable. He didn't have to wait long.

"*Well?* " Will said, shooting him an impatient look.

"*Patience, Will. Shouldn't we dine in peace first?* "

He got a withering glare in response.

Hannibal capitulated. He always did when it came to Will. " *We have to stay in Baltimore for at least another week. Possibly more. You have another mission to do here.* "

Will's face fell as the waiter arrived with his sleek black notepad. Hannibal made Will order for them in Italian.

The waiter soon departed, leaving them a bread basket.

"*I need to tell you something, Hannibal* ," Will confided, buttering a slice of bread with graceful strokes of his knife.

Hannibal tilted his head to indicate he was listening.

"*I… have ties in Baltimore. I was a student here for a number of years and I interned at Quantico for several summers. I was set on becoming an FBI agent before we met* ," Will explained, the barest tang of nervousness rising to the surface.

Hannibal allowed the silence to linger a beat longer. He observed the growing tension in Will's expression almost fondly.

" *Will, I knew some of this when I took you under my wing. Our society has a thorough screening procedure. We will work together to ensure you don't get tangled up with any aspect of your past.* "

"*Okay. But what if I run into someone I know?* "

"*Then we shall concoct a story together when the time comes. A tale to explain your 7 year journey back to Baltimore.* "

"*I can't think of anything anyone will buy.* "

"*I can. Fret not, Will. We will be ready when the time comes.* "

Will gave him a very dubious look, but their attention was soon turned away when the food arrived.

"*This conversation is not over* ," Will insisted, waving his pasta fork menacingly.

"*I know, caro* ."

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"*Will, let's move on now* ." Hannibal entreated. This was the fifth dog Will had stopped to pet. Unfortunately, this particular owner was quite enchanted with Will, and hadn't given him the polite throat clear and casual dismissal after the standard minute. It had been fifteen minutes now, and Will's Burberry trousers were being inundated with dog slobber and hair. Hannibal would have to send it for dry cleaning immediately. Worse, the dog owner seemed to believe that Will's continued presence was a sign that Will was flirting back with him.

"And this is?" the man asked, finally turning to Hannibal.

"Hans. He is a very good friend of mine." Will said, casually reaching for Hannibal's outstretched hand to lift himself up.

The man looked back and forth between him and Will carefully, noting their still connected hands.

“Oh. I see. Well, I must be on my way now. Always a pleasure to meet a fellow canine-lover.”

“Yes,” Will agreed with a smile. “Goodbye, Buttercup,” Will crooned, leaning down to give the puppy one last caress. It licked his forehead adoringly, making Will laugh. He stood back up dusting off his pants (spreading more hair around in the process) and turned to Hannibal.

Hannibal quickly ushered him onwards (before he decided to say goodbye to Buttercup for the fourth time, only to start another conversation), noting with no meager sum of vindication the crestfallen look on the owner’s face when Will did not acknowledge him.

“*This is not the way to the hotel* ,” Will commented, transitioning back to Italian.

“*Since we are staying here for a week, I thought it would be more comfortable for us to stay in a house.* ”

“*Did you rent one just for this week?* ” Will asked surprised.

“*No. You are not the only one with ties in Baltimore, Will. I own a home here.* ”

“*You’ve lived in the city before?* ” Will asked suspiciously.

“*I have not stayed here for many years,*” Hannibal quickly explained. “*I’ve had some hired help reopen the house this morning and make it suitable for us. They transferred the luggage while we were dining.* ”

“*Very efficient* ,” Will conceded, looking slightly uncertain.

He would change his mind soon enough. Hannibal knew enough about Will’s aesthetic preferences and tastes (as much as he pretended not to have them) to know Will would love his old home. Hannibal had not let the place go; renovating it every so often and keeping it up to date so it would be the perfect safe house if he and Will needed to lay low for a while.

“We’re almost there. As long as we have no more… distractions, we should arrive in another five or so minutes.”

Will raised one of his eyebrows into a sinful arch, and Hannibal’s heart stuttered. “ *If there is a dog, I* am *petting it. I’m on vacation until my mission arrives, Hannibal, and up till then, all the dogs in the world are mine.* ”

“*I’d love to see you explain that to their owners,* mažas vilkas,” Hannibal said, recovering.

“*They don’t need to know. It’s just between you, me, and the dogs, Hannibal.* ”

“*How careless, making me your confidant,*” Hannibal teased.

Will laughed. “ *How is it careless? You’re not telling anybody any time soon.* ”

“*Oh, why not?* ”

Will smiled impishly. “ *You like making me happy and dogs make me very* very *happy* .”

Hannibal could say nothing in reply to that for it was absolutely true. Fortunately, they arrived at the house in that very moment.

“*Here’s your key, Will.*”

Will nodded in thanks, stringing the loop around his neck and tucking it under his shirt.

They moved forward as Hannibal reached to unlock the door.

They were greeted by a cabinet of teacups alongside the wall. Will stepped over the threshold in awe.

“*This is where you kept them all?*” he asked, hushed.

“*Yes. Every single one.*”

Will smiled, bright and eager as the sun. “*Not quite. Where did you say the bags were?*”

“*Upstairs, second door to your left. Next to the master bedroom.*”

Will rushed up the stairs. He was back momentarily, sleek wooden box in hand. “*From France*,” he explained, passing it over to Hannibal.

Hannibal carefully lifted the lid and picked up the gorgeous black and gold teacup. He noted the intricate gold filigree approvingly. “*Beautiful.*”

Hannibal reverently opened the glass door of the cabinet and placed the teacup alongside the rest. An array of designs from many different countries gleaned in the refracted light of the glass door. The tradition started many years ago after a conversation about teacups and time. Will gifted Hannibal one from every place they went to. Hannibal knew it was a sign of his affection and friendship.

He never actually used them as they were only meant for one, and he never took tea without Will.

Surprisingly (or not, considering who it was), Will rapidly fell in love with Hannibal’s house. Will was used to staying in apartments, pent suites, and hotel rooms. But this was a home. Theirs for now. Something in him pinked at the thought.

There was a peculiar, almost pleasant feeling Will often had around Hannibal. A feeling of all time slipping seamlessly away from the clock and recircling to tick around his friend. A feeling of falling so completely into sync that he and Hannibal breathed in time with each other and fell asleep at the same moment. Hannibal’s house magnified this feeling several times over. The place could have easily fit in their memory palace, and Will wondered if it had been a source of inspiration.

Their rhythm was set. They had connecting master suites and shared a bathroom. Will made coffee while Hannibal cooked breakfast. They read aloud the interesting bits from the morning paper to each other, eventually completing the crossword together. Hannibal's formidable library had new shelves for Will's poetry books. Sometimes, they sat next to each other on the sofa and just read for hours, completely silent. In the evening, they shared drinks before the fireplace and spoke late into the night.

Will couldn't imagine needing anybody else for the rest of his life, and the feeling was so terrifying, he immediately shut it away. It was beyond love—it could not be spoken of at all. *What we feel most has no name but amber, archers, cinnamon, horses, and birds* .

This routine carried on for four days before Hannibal spontaneously decided that sparring on the mats in the exercise room every day was not enough. He was planning something, Will knew.

"It's a private gym. Very well-maintained with a large variety of fitness options. I have signed us both up."

"Let me guess, we're going there right now."

Hannibal smiled.

"You realize we only have a few more days in Baltimore? A monthly subscription is just wasteful," Will criticized.

"I do not trust anywhere else."

Will rolled his eyes.

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They arrived early. There were very few patrons there at 5 AM on the weekend, or maybe there was just few patrons in general. Will followed Hannibal wordlessly, not noting where they were going until the pungent aroma of chlorine flooded his nostrils.

Hannibal carefully avoided eye contact.

"No, Hannibal."

"Will you try, Will? It has been two years, Brangusis."

"No. I will not."

"I brought your swimsuit."

Will scoffed. "I don't care. I'm going to go find something else to do." He spun around petulantly and began walking away. Hannibal dragged him back before he could go too far.

"You expressed a desire to go to Prague, William. Was it wrong for me to think you want to move on now?"

Will paused.

“No. It was not wrong.”

“Then isn’t it time you swam again?”

Will remained silent.

“Will?” Hannibal prodded.

“I’ll tell you what, Hannibal. There’s a yoga class that starts in 10 minutes. I’ll go for that and after it ends, I’ll go into the hot tub with you.”

Hannibal was not completely pleased but it was a start. He released Will.

“That sounds like a marvelous idea. I will do my laps until then.”

Will gave him a stony glare as he left for Vinyasa Flow.

In the early years, in the time before Prague, they had gone swimming in the sea often. It was their favorite activity, snorkeling or diving together and watching life move below. Hannibal was good—it was his favorite way to exercise. But Will—Will had the sea in his veins. He was a selkie in the water—it parted around him, cradled him like he was their child.

Prague had taken the pleasure of water from Will, but Hannibal would give it all back.

Aversion therapy seemed the best course. What would be a pleasant association to create with water? Hannibal stilled as a rather sensual thought drifted across his mind. He and Will were not in that kind of relationship unfortunately. He would have to come up with a different association.

Chapter End Notes

Hi! I hope you enjoyed! If you did, please hit the kudos button and leave a comment below. I frequently read through all of my comments for motivation <3 It makes me incandescently happy to know that people enjoy my work.

The work title references a poem by Jack Gilbert. The line "What we feel most has no name but amber, archers, cinnamon, horses, and birds" is from that poem. The chapter title is a song by Ravel and it is so gorgeous.

I know the timeline may be a little confusing so allow me to clarify. Will is about 29 to 30 in this story. He joined the society almost immediately after graduating with his masters in crime scene investigation and forensics from George Washington University (which takes 2 years). It's been 7 years since then. He double majored in Psychology and Sociology at Hopkins (which is possible to complete in 3 years with the credit hour

demands and considering that Hopkins has no required coursework, just a distribution requirement). Hannibal and him have a similar age gap to cannon, making Hannibal slightly younger as well.

Edit 1/22/20 - Minor dialogue change

If you speak Italian, please correct me if I'm mistaken.

Non voglio sentire nessun inglese = I don't want to hear any English.
Come vuoi = As you wish
Arrenditi = Surrender
Mai = Never

L'isle Joyeuse

Chapter Summary

Will encounters a ghost from his past.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

What Will loved most about yoga was the corpse pose. Ironic, he knew.

Yoga, unlike anything really, gave him the feeling of transcendence. His prickly mind with all its sharp turnings quieted into a state where coherent thought was impossible to form, the pieces scattered like the glowing stars across the moon in that short film, “La Luna.”

Eventually he gathered himself back up, rising to clean his borrowed mat after the instructor ended class. Next time, he’d bring his own mat. The one he used had the faintest trace of sweat still clinging to it from its last user.

The sun was rising as he bumped into the woman near the studio room exit.

Will apologized, moving out of the way so she could leave first. Her face paled suddenly as she looked at him. She was trying to place him—identify him. Will’s mind rushed through the lengthy list of his targets, wondering if he had ever run into her on a mission. There was something familiar about her, but Will couldn’t quite place it. He would have to kill her to be safe. He needed to consult Hannibal as soon as he had something to identify her with.

She still hadn’t moved from her place. “Excuse me, is everything okay?” Will inquired politely, attempting to start a conversation.

The woman startled, stepping out of the way with a brusque laugh. “I’m sorry. You just bear a startling resemblance to an old friend. But this is not his kind of place, so it’s my mistake.”

Carefully, Will switched to more open body language, uncrossing his arms and slightly widening his stance. He leaned forward just a little, trying to broadcast flirtation without being too explicit. People were more open with someone who seemed interested in them. “He doesn’t like exercising?” Will asked coquettishly.

“No he’s fine with exercising—he’s just not the kind to do it in a gym.” She wouldn’t usually be this open with a stranger, Will knew. But she couldn’t quite convince herself that she really didn’t know him. He was familiar enough for her to inadvertently divulge details.

“Oh?” Will asked, as he slowly got his shoes from the cubby. The woman unconsciously matched his pace. He let the silence swell between them, knowing she would feel compelled

to answer his unspoken question.

Eventually, she did. “He was an outdoorsman, more of the fishing and dog-walking type of guy.”

Will froze. It couldn’t be. Even he couldn’t be this unlucky.

It only took another glance at the woman to confirm it. Oh fucking hell, he was talking to Alana Bloom. His best friend from his undergraduate. It had been almost a decade but Will didn’t know how he hadn’t recognized her immediately.

He examined her more closely. Stress had transformed the contours of her face. There were the barest hint of crow’s feet at the edge of her eyes. Laugh lines accompanied by dark circles under the lower lid. Something was deeply wrong in her life. She turned slightly, making eye contact. The key winded and released. Will saw her truths tumble into the air between them like broken strains of a song. It was so tempting to just close his eyes and listen. See what the music had to tell him. He could already hear the faintest thread of a melody—violets blooming in the shapes of bruises and handprints. Love was a hundred pitchers of honey pouring and pouring without any expectation of being—

He jolted out of his vision with a sharp inhale. He scolded himself for being intrusive since Hannibal wasn’t there to do it for him.

“Alana,” he said almost involuntarily.

She dropped her water bottle with a loud clang. Will winced.

“Will Graham?” she asked.

He nodded, mute.

She reached forward, pulling him into a hug before pushing him back. She looked like she was about to cry. “I thought you cut me off, jerk. Why didn’t you call afterwards?”

Will thought about what had happened to him the night he had been taken. The sequence of events that had led to meeting Hannibal and becoming his student. The never-ending days of training and traveling and language acquisition. The missions on top of missions that had been terrifying and strange at first before they had become another part of the routine—another part of his life with Hannibal. He felt every drop of his blood freeze instantaneously at the thought of her knowing what had become of him—the things he had done.

Will couldn’t look her in the eyes. “So much has happened, Alana. I’m so sorry.” It sounded lame, even to him.

“Do you think sorry is good enough, Will? You better be prepared to tell me what exactly ‘has happened’ if you have any desire to continue our friendship or any respect for me. I called you, over and over again at least two hundred times before I accepted that you had ended things between us. You never responded. Never texted. Never emailed. Nothing. That’s just rude.” She crossed her arms like she was trying to hug herself.

Will felt like an asshole. He couldn't very well come out and tell her that the society forbade contact with anyone from his life before. He had tried calling her once before his first assignment. Hannibal had been distracted by some gaudy painting at an art show in Italy and Will had snuck away, asking one of the servers for a phone. He had dialed her number in an alcove, waiting desperately as it rang. She had answered on the fifth toll. Before he could speak, Hannibal was dragging him away, hand covering his mouth, slight pressure on his windpipe. She was in the middle of saying "hello" when Hannibal cut the call off. His mentor had looked so incredibly disappointed with him in that moment—he could still see the expression now. It was only after their second year together that Hannibal stopped worrying about him trying to escape.

"I promise I'll explain everything, Alana. Right now is just a bad time; I'm meeting someone."

"Give me your phone," Alana demanded. Will complied and watched as Alana inserted her number into his contacts and texted herself.

"I'm giving you three days to arrange a time for us to meet. Three days, Will."

Will almost smiled. She was the same as ever. "Three days. Got it. I'll see you soon," he promised.
"Goodbye, Will."

She headed towards the parking lot.

All together, it had gone better than Will had expected. But now he had to figure out what the hell he was going to tell her.

Hannibal opened his eyes as Will's slender, nymph-like body slipped into the water next to him, looking vaguely uncertain. He observed the obvious look of relief on Will's face when he realized the water only rose to the top of his shoulders, leaving his slim neck rising above the cloudy surface, almost comically discombobulated. The fragrance of Hannibal's bathing products rose in the steamed air of the hot tub. Will had showered before entering, washing off the sweat from class.

"How was yoga?" Hannibal asked, reaching out to press Will's tender shoulder. He was very tense—most likely anxiety caused by their current aquatic situation, as Will's body usually reacted well to yoga.

"Ow," Will complained, but he didn't pull away. "Class was fine."

"Come here. Your shoulders are tense."

Will obliged reluctantly, slowly wading towards Hannibal.

When Will was finally in front of him, Hannibal reached out to knead the smooth flesh covering his trapezius muscles. He was almost gentle. Hannibal had noted on several occasions that Will bruised very easily. Soon enough, the heat and massage combined made Will relax. He moved back to sit in the underwater shelf by Hannibal, eyes almost drooping with sleep. His hair curled into ringlets from the humidity of the steam.

Will slightly angled his body to make conversation easier. The jets pounded into their backs.

“I ran into an old friend,” he said, resting one arm on the edge of the hot tub.

“Who?” Hannibal asked, suddenly alert.

“Alana Bloom. We were very close in my undergraduate years,” Will explained with a yawn. “I don’t think I’ve ever told you about her.”

Hannibal leaned forward to get a more in-depth scent profile. *There* , he recognized the smell of her skin.

“Did you just smell me?” Will asked, bemused.

“Difficult to avoid,” Hannibal replied. “I mentored Alana during the first year of her advanced degree. I recognize her on your skin.”

Will sat up, startled. “What?!”

“I had already made my switch to psychiatry at that point. I was an adjunct professor for the doctorate and graduate psychology students at Hopkins.”

Will scoffed. “You never mentioned you knew Alana.”

“When was I given a chance to mention it, brangusis? You said you wanted to keep things professional.”

“That was years ago, Hannibal! We’ve told each other many *things* since then. Our relationship isn’t professional anymore.”

“It never came up in conversation, Will. And if I recall, you’ve never spoken in detail about your undergraduate years. More likely for you to mention a close friend than me to mention one of the students I was advising. Didn’t you advise undergraduates when you were completing your masters at George Washington University?”

“Y-es,” Will reluctantly agreed. “But only casually. Not in an official capacity. And only when they asked.”

“Well I don’t know any of their names.”

Will huffed and turned away.

“This is a disaster, Hannibal.”

“What did you tell her?”

Will made an exasperated noise. “To be honest, nothing. I didn’t know what to say. She wants to meet again.”

Hannibal frowned. “Are you going to schedule another meeting with her?”

“Of course I am. She’s my best friend,” Will said.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea, Will? It might be easier in the long run if you cut this relationship off right now.”

“I’m sure, Hannibal. I want to leave on a good note with her.”

“Well, if it’ll give you closure, that’s fine, darling.”

“But what am I supposed to tell her?”

“The best lies hold within them a version of the truth. Tell her you were kidnapped.”

“Even though that’s true, it’s just too outrageous, Hannibal. She’ll look for crime reports.”

“We have nothing to worry about, Will. We can get all the appropriate documents in order.”

“Well what if she sees me with you?”

“If she sees you with me, I’ll tell her I was the one who found you first.”

Will scoffed. “How very gallant of you.”

“Very,” Hannibal agreed. “You were in the middle of a daring escape from your kidnappers when you stumbled onto a busy street. I was closest to you and you reached out to me and asked for help. I took you to the hospital, and visited you many times as you were being treated, and in the process, we formed a close bond.”
“This is sounding more believable by the second,” Will said sarcastically.

“You attempted to reintegrate into your old life, but found it disorienting. You were unable to feel safe in your own home. As we had formed a friendship by this point and I was about to take time off to travel, I offered you to join me, and we have not parted since.”

“She’s going to think…” Will cut off, turning his blushing face away.

Hannibal nudged him with his knee. “Yes, Will. What will she think?”

Will slowly turned back around, drawing close to whisper. “She’s going to think that we have a *sexual arrangement* , Hannibal. I was a scholarship student. I couldn’t afford to go gallivanting around the world at a whim. Certainly not after graduate student debt.”

“Is there some reason you don’t want her to think we have that sort of arrangement?”

“Well, it’s not *true* . Also, Alana wouldn’t see it that way. She would see it as you taking advantage of me during a time of great vulnerability and upheaval in my life.”

“Well, it will be up to us to convince her how happy you are with me. I believe my previous position as her mentor will give our argument more credence.”

“We can try,” Will conceded. “But that still doesn’t explain why I didn’t contact her for 7 years.”

“Perhaps after such a traumatic incident, you did not feel comfortable with reminders of the life you held before. Perhaps you wanted some time away from everything as you recovered.”

Will sighed. “We’ll see how this goes. It’s just so messy, Hannibal. This much reshaping of the truth makes me uncomfortable.”

“It is a tricky situation, Will. But I hope this will allow you to reconnect with your friend without jeopardizing our mission.”

They sat in peace for a moment, though Hannibal could tell there was still something unaddressed on Will’s mind. After several minutes of basking in the heat, it surfaced.

“I was actually romantically interested in Alana many years ago,” Will began, his tone a forced casual.

“Do you think some lingering feelings are enhancing your opposition to the idea of presenting us as romantically attached?”

Will recoiled like a startled octopus. “No way, Hannibal. I got over her years ago.”

Hannibal’s eyes narrowed, carefully perusing Will’s body language for any signs of self-deception or dishonesty.

“She turned me down pretty fast,” Will explained further. “I was too unstable for her.” Some traces of bitterness clinged to his tone, firmly contradicting the idea that Will had gotten over all of his passionate inclinations for Dr. Bloom.

Hannibal would have to nip that in the bud immediately. Will belonged entirely to him, physically and emotionally, from the dark curls crowning his beautiful head to the charming turn of his toes to the glittering workings of the glass palace of his mind. Hannibal hoarded it all with greed. It had taken several patient years to win this trust and affection from his beloved. Alana was not just going to walk in now and take Will from him. He would kill her first.

“Did you meet Dr. Bloom at yoga class?”

“Yes. I was surprised to find her here. I didn’t know she stayed on in Baltimore after her PhD. It’s such a strange coincidence that she goes to the same gym as you selected Hannibal.”

“This gym caters to a very particular clientele. It is difficult to get on the books, but once you do, your membership is essentially permanent. Additionally, members’ partners get into the system automatically. Alana may have gained access through such a method.”

“Are you suggesting that Alana has a partner who comes here?” Will asked.

“It’s very likely. It can take quite some time to get in if applying through the regular route.” Will rolled his eyes. Such places, by their very nature, offended him.

“It’s kind of weird to imagine Alana in a relationship,” Will confessed with a troubled frown.

“Why is that?”

“It’s nothing about her *personally* . Everything’s just altered so much in 7 years. She’s a doctor now and dating someone seriously enough to go to their gym. I feel like Rip van Winkle waking up to see his old world no longer exists. She’s become a completely different person.”

“You have also become a different person, Will.”

Will released a sardonic chuckle. “Yeah, I’ve become a hitman that excels at murdering people. What a fabulous transformation I’ve gone through. Truly a fucking butterfly out of the chrysalis.”

Hannibal’s eyes flashed. “We do more than that, mažas vilkas. In your own way, you are helping to save lives. Just the other day, you took out an arms dealer who was enabling several radical movements across the country.”

Will kissed his teeth. “Yeah, by convincing him to commit suicide. How noble of me.”

“Are you regretting his death? He killed his own daughter and numerous others, Will. He had blood on his hands. I thought you agreed that such people do not deserve to walk this earth.”

“They don’t! But why do *I* have to be the one to snuff them out?”

Hannibal’s face settled into a stony expression. “We have discussed this *many* times, Will. Shall I list the reasons for you *again* ? First, because you have the unique ability to see these men for who they are and determine the death they deserve. Second, because you have developed a skill set targeted at assassination and you are good at it. Third, you *like* this, Will. Last target aside, when you kill your blood races and your pupils dilate. You turn to me in celebration. Don’t pretend, Will. Your body can’t lie to me.”

Will looked away, shame clouding his expression. Seeing his old friend had obviously triggered some sort of moral crisis for Will. Hannibal wished they were already in Prague, away from any confusing influences. As soon as Will’s mission ended, Hannibal would whisk them away, old beaus be damned.

Hannibal reached for Will’s shoulder to turn him back around. Will avoided eye contact, looking down at the cloudy surface of the pool. “You are not pleasing me lately, Will. Why

all this doubt, darling? I thought we have already overcome this particular weakness of yours. And surely, you must know that your behavior the other night was unacceptable."

Will's expression grew enigmatic. He looked up, meeting eyes for once. He looked angry and confused, eyebrows scrunched together into a deep furrow. "Sorry, Hannibal. Being here again is just—"

There was a loud clatter at the doorway as a small group entered the pool area. Their privacy was compromised. Knowing his beloved, this was but another conversation that would go unfinished.

They sat in silence as the raucous sounds of splashing water and loud voices disrupted the ambience.

"Your skin's gone pruny," Will pointed out.

"So has yours. It's time we head back home."

"I'll drive." Will heaved out of the water, rivulets flowing down his fine musculature. Hannibal was quick to follow.

After they had showered and checked out at the front, Hannibal tossed Will the keys.

"Hannibal, I really am sorry. I'll do better," Will promised as he adjusted the mirrors.

Hannibal sighed. "It's forgiven, Will. We will be out of this city soon enough, and we can put this all behind us."

"Just make a smoothie, Hannibal!"

"Smoothies are the pinnacle of laziness, Will."

"I'm so hungry, I'll prepare my own smoothie if you don't hurry up."

"If you put one thing in that blender, you can skip breakfast altogether."

Will rolled his eyes.

"Your mission has come in. Stop pestering me and go look at it."

"Have you already read it?"

"No."

With a grumbling sigh, Will reached for his laptop, settling on the bar of the island so he was still facing Hannibal. He had the details up in an instant, scanning them thoroughly as he always did. After he had read through them once, he read through them again. It was unusual.

Will usually only needed to look through it one time to memorize it. Hannibal slid Will's plate across the island.

"Hannibal, come look at this right now," Will demanded.

Walking over with his plate, Hannibal settled in the seat next to his partner. He quickly read through the details.

The task was to identify and kill the Minnesota Shrike. Will's cover would be his own original identity. Furthermore, he would be working alongside Jack Crawford of the Behavioral Sciences Unit.

"Some higher-ups in the American government have obviously demanded this kill. Jack will not know what your true purpose in his unit is. You will be merely assisting as a profiler."

"Why is my cover identity myself?!"

"Your own credentials are perfect for this kill, Will. You have a masters in forensic crime scene investigation and have published several monographs and opinion pieces under your name, some of which have helped catch the killers they were commenting on. It is very useful in this particular scenario."

"The mission is unusual to say the least, Hannibal. I have an uneasy feeling."

"This does seem a little different than your typical assignments. Perhaps I will talk to our contact point in the society."

"Please do. Maybe they can bring some clarity."

Hannibal left the kitchen to make a call. He came back minutes later.

"I will be meeting with them this evening."

"Will you be back for dinner?" Will asked.

"Yes."

His conversation with Beverly flashed through his mind. Perhaps it was not quite the right time, with a mission on the horizon and all the messiness that came with meeting Alana, but maybe it was the only time he would get to surprise Hannibal with dinner. He could finally confess his desire for something less platonic between them.

Will worried for a moment about being rejected again. Hannibal had called his behavior the night he had kissed him unacceptable, but he could have just been talking about the going out and getting smashed part. This time his intentions were pure. He wasn't using Hannibal as a clutch for balance, or as an anchor. He genuinely wanted this. Maybe he'd just see how it played out. If Hannibal seemed receptive then maybe… Will felt his own cheeks heating up. Maybe Alana wouldn't be told a lie about them after all.

"Finish your breakfast, brangusis."

Will turned his attention back to the plate, already plotting how he was going to arrange everything tonight so Hannibal didn’t get suspicious.

Chapter End Notes

I know I have gotten some comments about where this story is going. I believe Hannibal's impending meeting with Bedelia should provide some much needed clarity. :-) I hope you enjoyed part 3. I am already working on part 4 so hopefully the gap between parts shouldn't be too too long this time.

Chapter title is one of my favorite pieces by Debussy. The line about pitchers of honey is from the poem mentioned last chapter (and the title of the work).

Side note, I really want to connect with / befriend other Fannibals online, but I'm not quite sure what is the best method of doing so. Does anyone have any recommendations?

Please leave a comment or kudos! I really love feedback about what you liked (so I can do it more) and/or what you didn't like (so I can fix it). Thank you so much!!!

Love,
- LovelyLotus

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!